

# THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE ASSOCIATION  
OF ASSISTANT LIBRARIANS

(Section of the Library  
Association)

*Edited by T. E. Callander, A.L.A.*

Fulham Public Libraries



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## EDITORIAL

THE next meeting of the Association will be held at Leighton House, Kensington, at 7 p.m. on Wednesday, 9th November.

*Speaker* : Mr. T. I. Clulow, Kensington Public Libraries.

*Subject* : "Plaints and proposals."

*Transport* : Leighton House is in Holland Park Road, W.14. *Buses* : Nos. 9, 27, 28, 31, 33, 49, 73, 92, 102, 173, 233, 273, alighting at the junction of Kensington Road and Warwick Road, and then 5 minutes' walk.

*Underground* : District Railway—High Street, Kensington Station, and then any of the above buses to Warwick Road. Central London Railway—Shepherd's Bush Station, and then buses 49 or 526, passing the top of Holland Park Road.

### LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

JOINT MEETING AT OXFORD, *Wednesday, 23rd November, 1932*

Birmingham and District Branch, London and Home Counties Branch, and A.A.L. Section.

#### PROGRAMME

12.15 p.m. London members leave Paddington.

2.2 p.m. London members arrive Oxford.

12.45 p.m. Birmingham members leave Snow Hill.

2.18 p.m. Birmingham members arrive Oxford.

On arrival the whole gathering will form into three groups as follows :

(i) Visit the Bodleian Library in charge of Mr. R. H. Hill, M.A.

(ii) Visit the Clarendon Press in charge of Mr. F. J. Thacker.

(iii) Visit Christ Church College and the Public Library in charge of Mr. E. E. Skuce.

*N.B.*—Arrangements will be made for the other members to visit the Public Library.

4 p.m. Tea at Rhodes House.

5 p.m. Meeting in the Milner Hall, Rhodes House.

*Speakers* : The President of the Library Association, Sir Henry H. Miers, M.A., D.Sc., F.R.S., who will deliver an address.

Professor G. N. Clark, M.A., Fellow of All Souls and a member of the Rockefeller Commission, will speak on the great Bodleian extension scheme.

7.5<sup>1</sup> p.m. Return train to Birmingham.

9.10 p.m. Due at Snow Hill.

7.53 p.m. Return train to Paddington.

9.20 p.m. Due at Paddington.

<sup>1</sup> There is a later train to Birmingham, leaving Oxford 9.8 p.m., arriving Snow Hill 10.37.

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*Cost.*—Return fare from Birmingham, 8s. 3d., tea and incidentals, 1s. 9d. Total, 10s.

Return fare from Paddington, 8s., tea and incidentals, 1s. 9d. Total, 9s. 9d.

Members travelling from other places are asked to make their own arrangements, but they are reminded that a minimum party of *eight* can travel at a single fare for the double journey from any station.

All intimations of attendance should be sent to Mr. G. R. Bolton, Public Library, Watford, Herts, or Mr. F. J. Thacker, Public Reference Library, Birmingham.

In doing this it is important that members should state which group they will join on arrival at Oxford.

It has been brought to our notice that there is a current rumour which says that, since there are no Correspondence Courses for Library Association Examinations in May 1933, there are no Examinations. This is entirely wrong. The first examinations under the new Syllabus will be held in May 1933.

The success of the Inaugural meeting, held at the London School of Economics on 12th October, augurs well for the current Session. Nearly three hundred and twenty members, including a large proportion of provincial library assistants, listened with delight to the address of Mr. A. P. Herbert who, though armed with a manuscript, incontinently abandoned it and gave one of the wittiest talks it has been our good fortune to hear. Sir Henry Miers, President of the Library Association, occupied the chair with an urbanity which did not attempt to compete with the scintillations of Mr. Herbert.

The manuscript which the speaker rejected is printed on p. 224, a privilege for which we offer Mr. Herbert our thanks.

The attention of London members is called to the lecture on "Modern library organization" which will be delivered by Mr. J. P. Lamb, City Librarian of Sheffield, at University College, Gower Street, W.C.1, at 5.30 p.m. on Wednesday, 16th November. This is an event which should not be missed.

In consequence of the resignation of Mr. K. G. Hunt, there is a casual vacancy for a London member of the Council. Nominations for this vacancy must reach the Hon. Secretary, Central Library, Hendon, N.W.4, not later than Tuesday, 15th November.

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### ON BEING FUNNY

THE word "lecture" alarms me; but I want to say at once that it need not alarm you. It generally implies that the person delivering it possesses certain knowledge which his audience does not. Or it may mean that he knows how to do a certain thing and is graciously pleased to tell others how to do it. This is not a lecture in either of those senses. At the end of my address I doubt if you will have received a single item of useful knowledge or practical instruction; and you will be no more fitted to take the place of Mr. Charles Chaplin or Mr. P. G. Wodehouse than you were before.

On the other hand, you may, by then, have been persuaded to keep clear of this arduous and over-crowded trade. Somebody once calculated that when he reaches the age of forty a man has spent fourteen or fifteen years in bed. I have spent about twenty years of the remainder in trying to be funny; but, alas, I am not yet in a position to tell you how it is done. I could only tell you one or two tricks, and I should not dream of doing so. For it is no use starting with nothing but tricks, though that, alas, is how many of us end.

No one, I think, has attempted to analyse the scent of a rose; no one, so far as I know, has explained how it is produced, or tried to produce it again. It is almost equally idle to attempt to analyse, explain, or manufacture humour. Nevertheless, the attempt has been made. German philosophers, I am told, have written volumes upon this subject. I do not know what they say; and I do not very much care. But I am sure that their labour is wasted.

But I have heard faint rumours of some of their theories. There is, for example, the cruel remark attributed to a learned lawyer at some gathering which was discussing the question, "What is the essence of humour?" Some said that the essence of humour was incongruity, some said it was misfortune, and some said this or that. But the lawyer said unkindly that "the essence of humour is *surprise*—and that is why you laugh when you see a joke in *Punch*." To which some regular subscriber to *Punch* replied that "the essence of humour is *recognition*—and that is why you laugh when you hear a joke in Court."

The only one of these theories to which I have ever given any serious attention is that which says that the essence of humour is *misfortune*. I have considered that with grave attention, for if it is sound, it would seem to follow that the humorist is one who batters upon the sorrows, discomfitures, and evil chances of his fellows. In other words, the old gentleman who slips up on the banana-skin is the type and essence of every joke. And any of you who care to think such things out may well examine this question if you have an idle moment—though I would not waste any other moment upon it. You will find that, at first, it is difficult to think of one of your favourite jokes or funny stories which is not

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founded on the discomfiture or misfortune of somebody or other. You will be particularly impressed by this theory if you study some of the humour, fun, or wit which is most popular at the present time.

I have sat through certain plays which were described by the critics, and acclaimed by the public, not only as humorous or funny, but intensely witty. And, coldly analysing the biggest laughs, I have come to the sad conclusion that they were all founded on sheer, though not always straightforward, rudeness. You will get the same impression from much American humour, especially on the films. On the other hand, you must remember that the *doctor*, the most humane of men, lives also upon the misfortunes of his fellows; but nobody thinks the worse of him for that. "Man," said Hazlitt in his Essay on the English Comic Writers—"man is the only animal who laughs and weeps—for he alone is able to distinguish between things as they are and things as they ought to be." And that simple sentence, I think, takes you as near to a correct analysis of humour as you are likely to come, however many books about fun the German philosophers may write.

If you have ever read one of the many books which describes some Utopian or perfect state of existence, you must have felt, as I have felt, that the one thing lacking in that perfect place was a sense of humour. The inhabitants stand about in Art-and-Crafty clothes, and everything is perfect, but nobody ever laughs; and eventually, however perfect the imaginary people may be, you come to the conclusion that they are rather dull dogs. Mr. H. G. Wells, in one of his many Utopias, does assure us that the inhabitants laugh merrily, but one cannot imagine why. And, when you come to think of it, in a condition of things in which everything was perfect, there could be very little, if anything, to laugh about. There would always, of course, be the spontaneous laugh of the individual who laughs for the sheer joy of existence; but that would become extremely tiresome in a very short time. That sort of laugh is only comparable to singing in the bath; and if you can imagine a state of existence in which everybody sang in their bath all day you will agree with me that Utopia would be a most fatiguing country to live in.

So we must admit, I fear, that there is something in the "misfortune" theory. It does not cover everything—few theories do. The laughter which Mr. A. A. Milne has created in such quantities has a much more kindly foundation than the laughs of Mr. Lonsdale, for example, or Mr. Somerset Maugham. Nevertheless, I fear that even Mr. Milne would find much less to be funny about in an all-perfect Utopian State. But there is no reason to stone Mr. Milne or any other humorist on that account. If there were no diseases the doctors would go out of business; and if everyone agreed about everything there would be no lawyers, and far fewer politicians; and if everything was as it should be there would be

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much less to laugh at, and much less opportunity for the humorist, satirist, or what-you-will. In short, the humorist has, in kind, though not in degree, the same function as the lawyer, or the doctor: he sees, if he is any good, more clearly than his fellows do, the difference between things as they are and things as they ought to be; he points this difference out and, by the weapon of ridicule, endeavours to reduce it. So you may say that, consciously or not, he is like the doctor and the lawyer—a reformer and a public servant. Like them he is always struggling to make a perfect world, in which there will be no place for him; and, therefore, in my opinion, we should take off our hat to the worthy gentleman.

But do we? Well, we all like a good laugh, it is true. Or so we say. And we all have a strong sense of humour. You may tell an Englishman that he has no morals, sense, or political sense, no business sense, and he will remain your friend; but tell him that he has no sense of humour and he will knock you down.

We are agreed that the sense of humour is one of the many great qualities which is almost entirely confined to the British race. And we agree that laughter "does us good," as the phrase is, mentally, physically, socially, and politically. We agree that it is a great blessing and can be a great weapon. We agree that the capacity to see a joke and laugh at it is one of the qualities which definitely distinguish us from the animals. And Mr. Charles Chaplin is perhaps one of the three most popular persons in the land.

One would expect to find, then, in a nation which pays so much lip-service to humour and laughter, that those who labour to provide this valuable commodity were held in the highest honour, gradually raised to positions of profit under the Crown, and pensioned off by a grateful State when they can make us laugh no more.

That is not exactly the position. Side by side with this admiration of humour as one of the great national possessions there is another strange but strong idea that humour is dangerous and disreputable, and that those who practise this black art are queer fish who ought not to be encouraged.

I am not now thinking so much of persons or personal rewards, though even here the evidence is fairly strong. Sir Harry Lauder has a knighthood and so has the Editor of *Punch*. But these are exceptions. You would not be surprised if you read that Mr. John Drinkwater or Mr. Hugh Walpole had been knighted; but you would be extremely surprised if you saw that Mr. P. G. Wodehouse had been knighted, or Mr. George Robey, or even a fine writer like Mr. W. W. Jacobs. And you would be surprised because the great names these gentlemen have made have been made by making people laugh. We have a Poet Laureate, but no Court Jester—though there is no reason to suppose that the Court does not, like the rest of us, like a good laugh. One of the most damaging terms of abuse in our language is the word "clown." Persons who write bad, serious verse

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receive much more attention from reviewers than persons who write comic verse. Gray made a reputation with a single Elegy in a country churchyard, but Sir W. S. Gilbert had to write comic operas. Most of you, I expect, have not read anything of Gray's except that Elegy (neither have I); and yet, if I were to ask you which was the greater man, Gilbert or Gray, most of you, I expect, would answer "Gray"—simply because Gray was solemn and Gilbert was amusing. You have been extremely kind to me; but you know perfectly well that in your heart of hearts you think there must be something queer about a man who solemnly sits down after breakfast every day and tries to be funny. (And you are perfectly right. There is.)

The Greek philosopher, Aristotle, I believe, in his *Art of poetry* started the odd snobbish idea that humour is rather disgraceful when he said that "tragedy is better than comedy, because tragedy is about fine men and comedy is about mean men." That may or may not have been true in Aristotle's day, but if you look at the proposition now you must agree that it is nonsense. The great tragedy of "Othello" entirely depends on the exceptional meanness of Iago and the exceptional stupidity of Othello and Desdemona. All the most popular tragedies are about murderers and maniacs: if people in real life behave as these "fine" people do in tragedies they are locked up, and rightly. In good comedy, on the other hand, the characters behave as men really behave, and, as a rule, they are much better characters. You may say that you prefer tragedy to comedy because you like blood and thunder—that is honest; but to say that tragedy is a superior art-form to comedy, because the characters are nobler, is nonsense, Mr. Aristotle. Compare, for example, the comedies of J. M. Barrie with the "gangster" tragedies of Hollywood.

Nevertheless, the prejudice against people who dare to be funny does exist; and while this matters little from the personal point of view, it is arguable that it may matter a lot from the political; for, if the humorist is one, as I have claimed him to be, who sees more clearly than others the distinction between things as they are and things as they ought to be, it should follow that his advice must be more valuable in political affairs than anywhere else. But this is not at all the view of persons in high political places, who, in fact, are inclined to regard humour as a sort of indecency instead of as a legitimate and valuable weapon. I was talking not long ago to a certain celebrated statesman, who said, "Poor old So-and-So used to make some very witty speeches in the House of Commons. Very funny he was—but it ruined him." When I asked why, he explained that when poor old So-and-So was being funny nobody believed that he was sincere; and when he stopped being funny nobody listened to him. The serious politicians regarded his fun as so much froth, quite forgetting that froth is only evidence that there is good beer below. That is the oddest notion of all, that humour of

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expression cannot go hand-in-hand with real sincerity of purpose. The late Lord Birkenhead suffered from it; and so, to some extent, does Mr. Winston Churchill. Both these great men would have commanded more of the people's confidence if they had been content to be solemn bores, instead of wrapping their serious opinions round shafts of flashing and penetrating wit. The truth is that in politics it is fatal to be funny.

If I may compare small things with great, and obtrude my own poor experience, I sometimes venture to write to *The Times* on some serious subject of public or political interest, expressing my sincere opinions in a would-be humorous manner. It is very rare for those who disagree with me to answer me—in *The Times*: either they shrug their shoulders in a friendly way and say, "It's just his fun"; or they write to me privately and recommend me to stick to *Punch*. "A humorist," they say sometimes, "should stick to his last." And, when they say that I know that I have touched somebody on the raw. For what in the world is a humorist's "last"? Why should he be regarded as a sort of cobbler licensed only to work in one material? The whole of life is his raw material; and provided that he has a due sense of responsibility he has as good a right to be funny about politics as about figs. If he is any good his humour will very seldom be "just his fun": it will nearly always be a criticism of life, and it is just as likely to be sound as the criticism of a solemn bore. One must not strike a woman because she cannot strike you back: it would be unkind to suggest that on the same principle you must not employ a sense of humour against the politicians—but there may be something in it.

Humour, then, I contend, should be taken seriously. It should not be resented in politics, but respected; and, when the proper occasion arises, it should be employed not only by statesmen but by the State. At a certain stage of the Prohibition farce the United States decreed that no British ships should enter an American port with liquor on board. Someone suggested that we should forbid American ships to enter our harbours unless they carried a definite amount of wines and spirits. People laughed and said, "Just his fun." But a Government with a sense of humour would have said, "Splendid idea!" and done it at once. And the good-humoured laughter of the world would have been more effective than a dozen solemn Notes of protestation. It might have ended Prohibition altogether.

Somebody once gave me a case of the practical use of humour, rather cruel, but I am sure, effective by the Sinn Feiners. The Great War was raging in Europe and Civil War in Ireland; and many of the Royal Irish Constabulary were being shot down by the rebels. The British Army recruiting authorities had a poster "Join the Army and see the World," and the Sinn Feiners, I am told, put up posters of their own alongside the others, "Join the R.I.C. and see the Next World."

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It would be very rash to suggest that any section of the British race could in any circumstances lose their sense of humour. But it does appear that many of us are, shall I say, more "touchy" than we used to be. Politics are by no means the only subject forbidden to the funny man. It is bad taste to make jokes about clergymen or the defenceless civil servant. Within the last few years three official or semi-official bodies have issued solemn appeals to the humorist, cartoonist, and dramatist deprecating the making of jokes about domestic servants, policemen, and plumbers respectively, on the ground that ridicule tended to discourage the sensitive young of our race from joining those honourable professions. I need not say that I am all against the infliction of needless pain, but when I try to imagine a sturdy son of the British proletariat declining to sign on as a plumber's apprentice for fear of an occasional oldish joke in *Punch*, I confess that I can only laugh heartily. If laughter is really so strong a deterrent the poets, lovers, musicians, and artists would long since have disappeared from the face of the earth. Yet the supply, I understand, is still fairly plentiful. And who has had more jokes made against him than the comedian?

Old jokes can be over-done, I agree, especially old jokes about domestic servants, mothers-in-law, and so on. But before these committees pass solemn Resolutions against this or that joke, they should realize that, if I may so express it, there is no joke without fire. Comedians would never have imitated the "parson" voice or the "Oxford" voice if a great many parsons and Oxford men had not talked in an unnatural and disagreeable manner. The joke about the plumber going back for the only tool he requires was not invented by some malicious jester, but was founded, and, for all I know is still founded, on fact. Laughter, I repeat, is a form of criticism, and to resent friendly laughter is to say that you are perfect.

And even now you do not begin to realize the difficulties of the trade, the number of the taboos. I once wrote an imaginary and would-be comic story about two dentists, to one of whom I gave the imaginary and would-be comic name of "Jasper Stabb." To my horror a real dentist called Stabb wrote in great indignation to the Editor of *Punch* protesting against the unwarranted and offensive attack upon him. "It cannot have been an accident," he said, "for I am the only Stabb in the *Dental register*." (The gentleman seemed to think that I had carefully looked through the *Dental register* seeking for some harmless dentist to devour.) And he went on to say, "Hitherto *Punch* has always lain with other periodicals upon my waiting-room table—henceforth it will not!"

When I was writing the letters of a girl called *Topsy*, one of whose oddities was the habit of using long adjectives in the wrong sense and the wrong places, I made her, once or twice, say that something or other was "perfectly *tuberculous*." The head of some excellent Society for the care of consumptives wrote and begged me not to use that word, as it might cause pain to my consumptive readers. I

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did not want to do that, so I cut out "tuberculous"; but next week, unfortunately, I made Topsy say that one of her enemies was a "perfectly leprous" woman. And in due course I had a letter from some Home for Lepers begging me not to cause pain to the lepers. Ever since then I have avoided using the word "wheeze" for fear of receiving a protest from the sufferers from asthma.

I am not complaining of these complaints, mind you: I only want to warn anyone who is thinking of setting up as a humorist. As you may imagine, on many a cold Monday morning, when the fire keeps smoking and the telephone keeps ringing, duns hammer at the front door and bills are heaped up on the table, children yell in the next room and sopranos warble in the street, the would-be humorist sits down and tears his hair and cries, "What in the world shall I be funny about to-day?" That question is forbidding enough; but a second question is becoming more formidable every year: "What in the world is it *safe* to be funny about?"

I now realize guiltily that I have said nothing upon that ancient topic—the distinction between wit and humour. I am not sure that it is a very important question. It is rather like asking "What is the difference between the pepper and the salt?" Indeed, on reflection, I fancy that that is as illuminating an answer as any other. On many dishes you can sprinkle both with advantage; but it will be very difficult to say which contributes most to the general flavour. Wit, like the pepper, is sharp and stimulating; humour, like the salt, is pervasive, satisfying, less assertive but essential. If you were to be left on a desert island with only one condiment I fancy you would choose the salt. And if you had to choose between an exclusive diet of wit or humour I fancy, if you are English, you would plump for humour. Wit is hard and sometimes cruel: humour is gentle and human and understanding. The wit laughs at others: the humorist, most often, laughs at himself. Wit without humour may become inhuman, and humour without wit may become feeble and mawkish. So it is better to have them together. Wit is like a cocktail, and humour like a glass of wine. Wit is largely a matter of words, and humour is more a matter of spirit and personality. Wit is Oscar Wilde and humour is A. A. Milne—that is, so far as one can fairly fix a label to anyone. And so far as it is possible or useful to distinguish between the nations, you might say that humour is more English and wit more French. I could go on like this for a long time, but I doubt if any of you would be wiser or better at the end of it. Anyone who does want to follow up this enquiry should look up, as I have just done, the article on "Humour" in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* by Mr. G. K. Chesterton. I gather, so far as I understand him, that that great authority and humorist agrees with me:

"Humour," he says, "involves some confession of human weakness; whereas wit is rather the human intellect exerting its full strength, though perhaps upon a

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small point. Wit is reason on its judgment seat; and though the offenders may be touched lightly, the point is that the judge is not touched at all. But humour always has in it some idea of the humorist himself being at a disadvantage and caught in the entanglements and contradictions of human life. It is a grave error to underrate wit as something trivial; for certain purposes of satire it can truly be the sword of the spirit, and the satirist bears not the sword in vain. But it is essential to wit that he should bear the sword with ease; that for the wit the weapon should be light if the blow be heavy; that there should be no question of his being encumbered with his instrument or laying open his guard. But honour can be of the finest and yet lay upon its guard or confess its inconsistency. . . . Wit corresponds to the divine virtue of justice, in so far as so dangerous a virtue can belong to man. Humour corresponds to the human virtue of humility, and is only more divine because it has, for the moment, more sense of the mysteries." And now, I hope, you know all about that.

There are many funny things about fun; and one of them is that fun is not always funny. If a thing is beautiful, say a rose, you may, as a rule, say that it will be beautiful always and everywhere. It would be difficult, for example, to think of circumstances in which a rose would look ugly or in very bad taste. But what is funny is by no means always funny. It varies as between persons, classes, generations, nations, and even places. We have all heard, for example, the theory that there is some difference between the sense of humour of those born north of the River Tweed and those born farther south. I shall not discuss this dangerous topic myself; but one may safely point out that the same thing is not always funny to the English and the French, to the colonel and the coster, to the man on the bench and the man in the dock. The sense of fitness is always struggling with the sense of fun; and the humorist has not only to fight his own sense of fitness, but those of other people; and that is why he has such a troublesome time. When you read in the papers that an observation by the judge caused loud laughter in Court, you sometimes raise your eyebrows and say, firstly, that it does not seem funny, and secondly, that it was out of place; and you may put the laughter down to the sycophantic insincerity of the barristers. Sometimes you may be right, but very often you will be wrong. The remark is not funny to you in the newspaper, and probably it would not have raised a smile if it had been said on the stage; but it was funny in Court, in that place and at that time, dropping down benignantly from the solemn bench in the gentle tones of the kindly old judge; and if you had been there you would have laughed heartily too.

The judicial humorist is fortunate, no doubt, in that he has his audience and his atmosphere all nicely prepared for him: the placid Court is like an unruffled lake, in which he can make a very large impression by dropping a very

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small stone. A joke in Court is very often funny, because it is a joke in Court. But it is not fair to condemn it as a bad joke on that account, as we sometimes do. The judge, like the popular comedian, fits his fun to his surroundings. Lord Darling, for example, has had less than justice done to him by the Press, who have fastened on his more obvious and less successful quips and not so often repeated his more brilliant witticisms. Lord Darling spent most of his early days at the Bar pleading before the magistrates at Quarter Sessions; and once he said that he spent his youth in giving instructions in the law of the land to those who administered the one by virtue of their owning the other.

Lord Hewart is another great legal fun-maker when he likes, especially in after-dinner speeches. I believe that he is seldom funny in Court; but once when asked how he enjoyed his life on the Bench he said that it consisted in the settling of disputes arising out of collisions between two stationary motor-cars, each on the right side of the road, and blowing their horns.

Now, in contrast to the quiet Court, think of a big theatre on the first night of a comedy, musical or not—the lights, the band, the dresses, the famous comedian anxious to give pleasure, the audience eager to be amused—all the apparatus of public fun-making tuned up to the highest pitch. But something goes wrong, and the lines which were intended and expected to raise a storm of laughter are received in stony silence; on the other hand (a small consolation, though it only adds to the perplexity of the business), lines which were not even intended to be funny are received with merriment and rapture; and while the famous and expensive comedian falls flat, some small-part, small-salaried fellow blossoms out unexpectedly and is hailed as a miracle of mirth. No one really knows what will be funny on the stage. What seems wildly funny to the author when he writes it, and to the manager when he reads it, and to the actors when they first rehearse it, may fall like lumps of dough upon the ears of the first-night audience, to say nothing of the critics. What is funny at an ordinary rehearsal on a cold winter's morning, when the actors are huddled up in overcoats, suddenly ceases to be funny at a dress-rehearsal when they have their pretty costumes on. A song which is funny with a piano is not funny with a band—and so on. A line is side-splitting when spoken by a principal actor with great experience and personality; and, spoken by his understudy, it may be dull or even offensive. To an author a first night is always an agony, and generally an astonishment, one way or the other. Personally I am painfully accustomed now to hearing my favourite lines go for nothing, but I am still astounded by the lines which cause merriment unexpectedly, lines, sometimes, intended only to explain the plot. (Still worse, of course, are the lines which raise a laugh in the wrong place, when the effect desired is a serious one; but that is a subject too painful even to discuss.)

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This uncertainty about laughs provides a very important practical difficulty both in films and on the stage. You would laugh if you could hear a company of actors, with the producer and author, discussing and arranging for the "laughs" which some scene or series of lines is expected to create. They have been rehearsing for some weeks, perhaps, and, for them, nearly all the original fun of the lines is long since stale or dead. Nevertheless, technically, or from the recollection of the first reading, it is argued that a "laugh" is to be expected in this place or in that. "The laugh will come there," they say confidentially; "and therefore the actor who speaks the following line must wait and not speak through the laugh, or the next laugh, which his line is to create or prepare, will be lost. And then the first night arrives, and the grand laugh which has been so solemnly arranged for does not occur. Sometimes, even, as a disappointed author cowering in a box, I have laughed myself at those moments, knowing what the disappointed actor is thinking, or even muttering, on the stage. Which goes to support the theory that humour is largely founded upon misfortune.

On the films, you would say, the difficulties are greater still, for, if you allow space for a laugh which does not happen, there will be an intolerable hiatus, and, if you do not allow for it and it does happen the next line will be obliterated. I know little about the films and cannot tell you how this difficulty is met. But I doubt if the stage is much better off. On the stage you can, of course, readjust your pace and your pauses in theory; but it is not always so easy in practice. This business of laughs is, of course, a great source of grief, trouble, and even tears among the acting profession—or rather, among such companies as are not happily cast or well-managed. One night, by some accident, perhaps, the unhappy or discontented Miss X— hears a loud laugh after one of her lines: the laugh may have been caused by a rat running on the stage or by another actor making a face; but Miss X— becomes convinced that she is entitled to a laugh at this point, and if the actress who speaks the following line does not wait for Miss X—'s laugh to happen there is trouble: Miss X— is persuaded that Miss Y— is spitefully and maliciously doing her out of her laugh, and arguments, threats, entreaties, tears follow; and I have known cases where Miss X— has declared war and announced her intention of doing Miss Y— out of some of *her* laughs, by way of revenge. And she has done it. All of which is but a little more evidence that the business of laughter is not quite so simple, spontaneous, or gay as some of you may have thought.

One of the many good reasons why I should not deliver a lecture is that a lecture, as I understand the word, should be largely concerned with theory, and my own taste leads me to practicalities rather than theory. I feel now that I should give you another dose or slab or chunk of theory. Well, I have talked, quite uselessly, about the distinction between humour and wit. Now consider

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for a moment some of the other distinctions or classifications which you can make in the world of fun-making. If you do that you will be struck at once by the very large number of words we possess in this department. There is only one English word for love—and very few rhymes for it. When things get really bad you can only say, "I love you." But think of the number of ways, or words, in which you can enjoy or express fun, or be or feel funny. You can smile, laugh, chuckle, giggle, snigger, howl, burst yourself, or split your sides (I once had a cook, by the way, who used to say to me "Oh, Mr. H., I did laugh—I laughed fit to kill a military horse"); then you may joke, jest, jeer, ridicule, taunt, take off, caricature, kid, cod, and so on; you may be a wit, wag, humorist, facetious fellow, clown, comedian, or buffoon; the thing that makes you laugh may be funny, comic, ridiculous, laughable, absurd, farcical, silly, grotesque; and, coming down to the more literary terms, the thing that amuses you may be comedy, farce, burlesque, parody, pastiche, satire, sarcasm, ironic, sardonic, witty, humorous—or merely funny. I do not pretend to have exhausted the list of words—I have given you the first that came into my head. But this wealth of words does suggest, I think, that England cannot really be a nation entirely lacking in fun and humour.

What is the difference, now, between satire and sarcasm, between sarcasm and irony, between the ironic and the sardonic? I feel it my duty to indicate the existence of these questions to you, though I am not really able or anxious to provide you with an intelligent reply. Next time you hear an amusing line in a play, or address a telling retort to one of your friends, you may like to ask yourself afterwards, "Was that satirical, sarcastic, ironical, sardonic, cynical, or what?" On the other hand you may not. If you do wish to pursue these questions further, I recommend you to look at that admirable but headachy book—Fowler's *Modern English usage*. There (under the heading "Humour") you will find a tabular statement showing the distinction between humour, wit, satire, sarcasm, invective irony, cynicism, and the sardonic—their different motives, provinces, methods, and audiences. It looks rather like a statistical table of exports and imports, and it has made my head ache, but I am sure it is quite right. The motive of satire, for example, is given as "amendment"; the motive of sarcasm "the infliction of pain"—and so on. I will not follow the learned professor all over the field—but there are three words which we all do use very loosely and might well make an effort to use correctly—the words satirical, sarcastic, and ironical. "Satire" and "satirical" are fairly easy: satire is a form of literature, and a form of criticism, like parody; satire criticizes men's manners as parody criticizes, by imitating, their writings; and their method is very often the same—that is, the original is imitated very closely, but with such a twist as to show it in a ridiculous light.

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A writer, for example, who described the game of golf as "a procession of elderly gentlemen hitting small white balls with long thin sticks" would be using the weapon of satire. But when two bargees or two 'bus-drivers exchange some wounding repartee, it is wrong to say, as we sometimes do, that they are being "satirical," for they are not using any literary form. They may be using "invective," which is a direct statement imputing misconduct and intended to discredit; or they may be sarcastic or ironical (or, I *think*, a little of both, though here I am in a little bit of a fog). Irony is one of the more delicate forms of criticism of abuse (though I hasten to say that it may be, and is, employed with great effect by bargees and 'busmen). "Irony," says Professor Fowler, "is a form of utterance that postulates a double audience, consisting of one party that hearing shall hear and shall not understand, and another party that when more is meant than meets the ear, is aware both of that more and of the outsiders' comprehension." Have you got that? No? Well, it consists in a statement of facts, or the use of words, intended to convey one meaning to the uninitiated part of the audience and another to the initiated. There is a dramatic irony, for example, where someone says to the villain, "You will find an old friend in that room," and you know, but the villain does not know, that waiting for him in the room is his deserted first wife or the man he thinks he has murdered. If you marooned a man on a desert island and he implored you to leave him some water, it would be ironical (though inhumane) to reply, "There is plenty of water all round you"; and the poet's phrase, "Water, water, everywhere and not a drop to drink," is a good illustration of that overworked phrase "the irony of fate." As a rule irony consists in saying less than you really mean—while sarcasm, as a rule, consists in saying what you don't mean at all.

There is a story that at the recent Election a candidate pulled from his pocket a pound-note and said solemnly, "My friends, at this moment this note is only worth 16s. 3d." And a voice from the back said, "I'll give you 17s. for it, guv'nor." That, I take it, was irony. Supposing that I continued this lecture an hour beyond the time desired, and the Chairman said to me mockingly, "Don't hurry yourself—we've nothing else to do," that would be merely sarcasm; but if my audience had quietly crept away by ones or twos and the Chairman said, "Don't hurry yourself—you're really not keeping us"—that, as I understand the matter, would be irony. But Professor Fowler seems to suggest that the essence of sarcasm is the intention to give pain by bitter words, which words may be ironical or not; so now we are in a muddle again.

I shall not attempt to keep you with these difficult affairs any longer; I only throw out a few suggestions for refined conversation in the long winter evenings. And, quite apart from this particular topic, I do strongly recommend Professor Fowler's book to you.

A. P. H.

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### VALUATIONS

By FRANK M. GARDNER

*Children's reading at East Ham*

TO the historian of the future, I imagine that one of the curiosities of this modern age will be its lack of reticence. He will be struck, for instance, by the eagerness of our younger writers to compile their autobiographies, long before they have digested what few experiences they have had. He will note the increasing tendency to do all the most important things of life, such as eating and drinking and love-making, in public instead of in private. He will comment appropriately on the magazine pages of our popular press, where our great and famous (such as have news value) expose the anatomy of their souls at so much a line. Here he will have footnotes on the phenomena of Mr. James Douglas and Mr. Geoffrey Gilbey.

Among the minor joys of what should be the most interesting chapter of a work on the twentieth century, tucked away with notes on the female exposure of dressing-table secrets to the public gaze, and on the significance of psycho-analysis, there will almost certainly be a reference to questionnaires.

The questionnaire is undoubtedly a peculiarly modern product. Like most modern products, it comes from America, where it was originated by psychologists and social workers as a useful method of collecting data. Business men and others were quick to see its possibilities, until now, I believe, questionnaires are issued relating to anything from war-debts to shaving-cream. In England, the habit has not yet taken root, and its recent manifestation in Sir William Beveridge's *Family form* was received with a mixture of derision and resentment.

The questionnaire, when put to base uses, can be a public menace, and one views with horror the prospect of it becoming as popular here as it is in America. But it should be remembered that in social matters it is practically the only method of investigation. In library work for instance. It is one of my perpetual complaints, as you no doubt know, that library work is one-sided. It is very exact and scientific in its dealings with books. It is most lamentably slipshod in its dealings with the people who read the books. Until this one-sidedness is repaired, librarianship will not have advanced very far from the days when the librarian was a man who kept books (in very much the same way as a man collects stamps). One of the lines along which development must proceed is by the questionnaire, and for that reason I welcome this report on a questionnaire on children's reading at East Ham. It is not the first of its kind, of course. There have been others, and I suppose that Mr. Osborne's recent paper on children's reading, which I have not yet read, was founded on a questionnaire. But this report is the first

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that has come my way. It is not quite my idea of what a questionnaire should be, but it is interesting enough to be considered at length.

Three questions were asked at East Ham. They were, the particular book enjoyed most, the type of book enjoyed most, and the favourite magazine. In addition, particulars of age and school were required. A copy of the form asking the questions was distributed to every boy and girl attending the library, and eighteen hundred children filled it in. The age divisions as shown in the replies are interesting. Eleven-year-olds are the keenest readers, and an age graph would show an almost pure parabola, with eleven as the highest point. Why is this, I wonder? Is it a proof of the stifling process of education?

The answers to the questions do not show very much more than one expected. No report is given on the answers to the first question, which is a pity. If it was thought worth asking, why is it not worth while giving the results?

On the second question, the most noteworthy feature is that girls' reading is very much less varied than boys'. Two-thirds of the girls' votes go to school and fairy stories, while two-thirds of the boys' are divided among five types of story. Not only that, but the boys' reading shows rather better taste: 66 votes for history against 40, 44 for animal stories against 27, and so on. Thus the superiority of the male sex is pleasingly demonstrated. Both boys and girls show a surprising lack of interest in animal and nature stories. From unstatistical observation I should have thought this a most popular class of book—and it is certainly the best written.

The children's librarian mentions the popularity of war books among boys—they received 134 votes—as distressingly high. I think of Saki's *Toys of peace* and smile. War is the essence of adventure to the boy, but his play with lead soldiers is reassuringly unreal. It is only when the grown-up refuses to see the reality behind romance, and wants to play with soldiers in life, that I begin to be distressed. There is a world of difference between Mr. H. G. Wells and Mr. Winston Churchill, though they are both at their best when writing about war.

The answers to the third question, on magazines, provided some interesting results. A third of the children had apparently no favourite magazine, and a quarter voted for magazines not in the junior library. This last is not surprising, for when I was young (or younger) most of the magazines approved by adults were thought "pi." Some of those not approved by adults were, by the way, even more "pi." My favourite periodical at the age of eleven was a weekly called "The Nelson Lee library," whose anonymous author drew the long bow better than any juvenile author I have met before or since. At the age of eleven a certain sameness became apparent in these extravaganzas, and when I discovered Wells I had finished with juvenile literature for ever. But I must not digress into my own case-history.

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From the answers that went according to plan, it appears that the most popular girls' magazine is *My magazine*, and the most popular boys' *The Meccano magazine*. These results are most curious, since they entirely oppose the results on books. The popularity of *The Meccano magazine*, which received double the votes of its nearest competitor, is a pointer to the increasing mechanical tendency of the modern boy, but why does this show only in the choice of magazines, and not in the choice of books?

This is one of the things on which I thirst for more information. As I hinted, I found this questionnaire interesting, but not nearly so interesting as it might have been. Perhaps the technique of the questionnaire is not fully understood, for I feel that with a little more trouble, much more might have been learnt, and more definite conclusions drawn.

There are two chief requirements for the successful questionnaire. Firstly, the questions must be so detailed as to remove any possibility of misunderstanding on the part of the person answering the questions. Secondly, the results must be analysed deeply enough to justify the enquiry. The method resolves itself into one of detail, detail, and yet more detail.

On the form that the children were asked to fill in at East Ham, the second and key question was far too loosely framed. Choice was limited by the use of the word "story," though it is obvious that quite a number of answers went outside it. Also, some indication of the classification adopted in the tabulation of the answers should have been given on the form. Most important of all, it is surely necessary, when making an enquiry of this kind, to try to discover some of the reasons behind choice. It is not enough to learn that nearly one-half of the girls prefer school stories to any other kind of reading. We could have discovered that from an issue census anyway. What the questionnaire is for is to give some hint of why.

The faults of the report are caused by the faults of the questions, which preclude the possibility of any deep analysis. The best is made of what material is available, and some of the comments are shrewd. But some vital information is omitted. What, for instance, is the age at which children are admitted to the adult library? What is the stock of the library in the various classes into which the answers to question two are divided? This may be important. It may, for instance, go some way to explaining the comparative unpopularity of nature and animal stories.

It is a pity, too, that the statistics are to some extent nullified by the decline in readers after the age of eleven. Otherwise we might have got some interesting figures regarding the changes in children's reading according to age. There is a marked decline in the popularity of fairy stories after the age of eleven, but there is no corresponding increase in any other type of reading, due to the total decline.

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A proportional and graphical presentation of the figures might, however, give a hint as to changes.

But perhaps there I ask too much. I have judged this report, I am aware, by a standard it was probably not intended to attain. But though I ask, as usual, for more than I get, I will thank the children's librarian at East Ham for a most interesting half-hour.

### THE DIVISIONS

#### EASTERN DIVISION

A MEETING of the Eastern Division of the A.A.L., held at Norwich on Thursday, 6th October, was attended by members from Norwich, Ipswich, Great Yarmouth, and Lowestoft. Mr. G. Stephen, F.L.A., Chief Librarian of Norwich, and Mr. L. Chubb, F.L.A., Chief Librarian of Ipswich, were present.

The members were welcomed at the Mile Cross Branch by Mr. Alderman Henderson, Chairman of the Public Libraries Committee and the Chief Librarian of Norwich. The business meeting took place immediately. At the meeting it was decided to form a "Forward Policy" Sub-Committee, with Mr. G. V. R. Hayward as Chairman, the Committee consisting of a representative from each of the Libraries of the Division.

After the meeting tea was provided at the Branch by the Norwich staff.

Mr. C. Smith, of the Ipswich Public Libraries, read a stimulating paper entitled, "The Library as a cultural centre." A lengthy discussion followed.

The meeting closed with hearty votes of thanks to Mr. Smith for his paper and to the Norwich staff for their excellent hospitality. K. M. S.

#### MIDLAND DIVISION

What proved to be one of the liveliest Annual Meetings in the history of the Division was held at the new Acock's Green Branch of the Birmingham Public Libraries on 21st September. The formal business was relegated to the latter part of the evening, the first part being devoted to a very vigorous discussion on the recommendation of the Annual Meeting at Leamington concerning a ballot on the eligibility of chief librarians to serve on the A.A.A. Council. Mr. Hilton Smith, who was present at the invitation of the Divisional Committee, put to members the point of view of the London members of the Council on the matter.

Then came the ordinary business of the evening—Annual Report, Statement

## The Library Assistant

of Accounts, and so on, not forgetting a very important step taken by the adoption of certain recommendations from the Joint Committee of the Division and the Birmingham & District Branch of the L.A. Hereby it was decided that local meetings (with reservations) of the Branch and the Division be under the control, from January 1933 onwards, of the Hon. Secretary of the Joint Committee, and further, that meetings should normally consist of (a) a Junior meeting, (b) a meeting for the transaction of Divisional and Branch business respectively, and (c) a Library Association meeting. The adoption of this measure is a landmark in the professional history of the Midlands. There are already welcome evidences that the Junior Meeting will be an especially popular feature.

A debate on the nationalization of libraries had to be adjourned to a future meeting owing to lack of time, and a meeting little short of epoch-making thus terminated.

J. H. D.

### NORTH-WESTERN AND YORKSHIRE DIVISION

JOINT MEETING WITH THE MANCHESTER FELLOWSHIP AT MANCHESTER  
*12th October, 1932*

By kind invitation of the Chairman and Committee, a very enjoyable meeting was held at Manchester on 12th October. The members, some two hundred strong, assembled at the Reference Library at 3.15 p.m., and here two parties were formed. One party, under the guidance of the Chief Librarian, Mr. C. Nowell, visited the new central premises now under course of construction, while the other visited the famous John Rylands Library. In the absence of Dr. Guppy, Mr. Guthrie Vine, M.A., Sub-Librarian, conducted the members round the library, his expert guidance making the visit one of great pleasure and profit.

At the generous invitation of the Chairman of the Libraries Committee, Councillor R. W. Shepherd, tea was taken in the Lord Mayor's Parlour, at which speeches of welcome were made by the Lord Mayor and Councillor Shepherd. Replies on behalf of the Divisions were made by the President of the Yorkshire Division (Mr. S. A. Firth) and Mr. F. A. Richards (Hyde).

Mr. W. G. Fry (Deputy-Librarian, Manchester) occupied the chair at the evening session. After brief introductory remarks he called upon Mr. Nowell to deliver his address upon the subject of "Education and librarianship." Mr. Nowell is a Library Association examiner, and in common with all other examiners, I have previously regarded him as a being—as distinct from a human being—whose *raison d'être* in life consists of preventing as many assistant librarians as possible from attaining the ranks of F.L.A. After hearing his address I

## The Library Assistant

marvel that the percentage of passes is so high, and realize that the patience of the examiner must be infinite. Extracts quoted from examination papers would have been screamingly funny had not the pathos of extreme ignorance ever been present, while one almost wishes one's life-work could be treated so lightly as to begin an examination answer with "I don't want to ram things down you chaps' throats," or "I have no knowledge of co-operation between county and urban libraries, but I know quite a lot about other forms of co-operation." Each member present was presented with a list of spelling mistakes, all taken from recent examination papers. They had to be seen to be believed—"middleman's prophet," "wright number," "currant year," "pylosophy," "fauteen"—to mention but a few. Other points mentioned in Mr. Nowell's address included the new syllabus, the appointment of university graduates, and the importance of periodical information for examination purposes.

Many members took part in the discussion which followed: the enthusiasm displayed by the abundance of speakers formed adequate testimony to the quality of Mr. Nowell's paper. The discussion, unfortunately, was brought to a premature end by the necessity of many Yorkshire members having trains to catch.

The entire meeting was a great success, and cordial thanks are due to the Lord Mayor, the Chairman of the Libraries Committee, Mr. Nowell, Mr. Fry, and the Manchester Fellowship.

G. P. JACKSON.

### SOUTH WALES AND MONMOUTHSHIRE DIVISION

The first meeting of the Division of the winter session 1932-3 was held at Llandrindod Wells on Wednesday, 28th September, following a meeting of the Welsh Branch of the Library Association. The Divisional meeting took the form of a "Parliamentary" debate on a "Libraries bill for Wales." The Bill aimed at the recognition of the library system as an educational service for purposes of grants-in-aid and general administration, transference of library powers from the smaller authorities to the counties, and the setting up of a Libraries Council for Wales with an inspectorate and scheduled minimum standard of efficiency.

The Speaker, Councillor W. A. Howell, J.P., while insisting on strict Parliamentary procedure, greatly enlivened the debate by his own remarks and reminiscences, and proved an extremely popular "Speaker" (although he dared on one occasion to reprove the present writer!). The Chairman of the Division, Mr. L. A. Burgess, F.L.A., acted as Clerk of the House, and the Bill was ably introduced by Mr. F. McDonald, F.L.A., who succeeded in getting the measure passed by a small majority.

## The Library Assistant

It was extremely pleasant to note the courteous gesture of many Chief Librarians in staying to the Divisional meeting and participating in the discussion.

Arrangements are being made for the November meeting of the Division to be held in West Glamorgan, probably Port Talbot, with a visit to Margam Abbey. The December meeting will be the Annual General Meeting at Cardiff.

The indexing of the Welsh Periodicals for 1931 is making good progress, and the volume will probably be ready for publication by the New Year.

ELLIS SELICK, *Hon. Secretary.*



## NEW MEMBERS

LILIAN M. BALLARD (Lambeth); P. L. Eyre (Shoreditch); Joan Houlgate (Woolwich); Shelagh H. Jeffery (Cheltenham); Mary P. D. Marshall (Kingston); Rowena E. Merchant (Welwyn); Margaret B. Niven (Bulawayo, S. Rhodesia); Ivy M. Oliver (Bristol); A. B. Paterson, Mary Wilkinson (Glasgow); Arthur T. Picton (Chemical Society); G. D. Savage (Bristol University); Edith D. Smith (Fulham); Alec H. Wallace (University College, Nottingham); Miss K. Wood (Dartford).

*Midland Division.*—Alfred Andrews, Roy Broadbent, George Chandler, Walter T. Dunsby, Kenneth A. L. Roberts (Birmingham); Ernest Bletcher (Coventry); Elsie G. Pailing (Gloucestershire County); Violet L. Fennell, Norah W. Toone (Leamington Spa); Margaret A. Stokes (Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham); Dennis J. Harding (Smethwick); Clara M. Matthews (Wolverhampton).

*North-Western Division.*—Mary F. Baron (Bacup); Miss H. Shaw (Hyde); Kathleen Bailey, Margery W. Bissett, Phyllis M. Bland, Wm. Blease, Esther Finn, Jas. Fletcher, G. Eric Haslam, Ronald Hewitt, Barbara Heywood, Joseph Hompes, W. Kelly, Margaret H. Kerr, Miss E. Madders, Hilda Massey, Marjorie E. Noble, Annie Peace, Ethel R. Smith, Ethel Stanner, Elsie Sullivan, Muriel Wilkin, Edna M. Wood (Manchester).

*South Wales Division.*—Dorothy M. Williams (Cardiff).

*Yorkshire Division.*—Annie Wragg (Sheffield).

*Correction in October List.*—Olive M. Smith (Birmingham) not Olive F. Smith.

## The Library Assistant

### CORRESPONDENCE

MIDDLESEX COUNTY LIBRARIES,  
HANWORTH ROAD,  
HOUNSLOW,  
MIDDLESEX.

*18th October, 1932.*

TO THE EDITOR,  
THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT.

DEAR SIR,—

#### AN INVITATION

During recent years a number of London assistants taking the Library Association Examination in Library Routine have visited this Library, with a view to obtaining some practical knowledge of County Library Work. They have received a hearty welcome from my staff, who make the visit an opportunity of reciprocating many courtesies received from their Urban colleagues.

This year, we propose to be at home on Wednesday afternoon, 16th November, from 2.30 p.m., and a hearty invitation is extended to all students. A post card intimating a desire to attend is all that is required.

Yours faithfully,

R. WRIGHT.

P.S.—The nearest station is Hounslow East, on the District Railway. On leaving the station turn left to main road, then right until a fork road is reached. The left-hand fork is Hanworth Road, and these headquarters are on the left-hand side.

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